

# ILLUSIONS OF FULFILLMENT

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As we approach thanksgiving we often turn our thoughts to the idea of thanksgiving which I think is appropriate and valuable. Scripture talks a lot about being thankful, but I think one of the prerequisites of true thanksgiving is often overlooked and even masked in our culture and setting. To be thankful is to be truly grateful with what one has, but I think true thanksgiving includes being content with what one has as well.

We often exist in the illusions of fulfillment much like Neo in *The Matrix* in which the things that we believe are real and valuable are only illusions. Since the beginning of creation there has been the temptation of the illusion of fulfillment. Adam and Eve were tempted with the thought of having the knowledge of good and evil and being like God. In essence they coveted knowledge and desired it. When Moses gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments the tenth commandment was to not covet. But our fallen and sinful world is marked by promises of fulfillment that, in the end, are just illusions of fulfillment.

Like any good illusion we believe it is real but at the same time I think we know deep down there is illusion to it. Like the commercials that promise a sense of fulfillment if you buy their make-up or clothes, or the thought of a bigger and better house or vehicle, or even the thought that life would be better if we made more money or had a better job or a better spouse. It is the thought that when we look at our neighbours (literal or metaphorical) we often think that if we had their house, job, car, family, etc. we would be happy. But what we don't see is the truth behind the illusion. Most of us in the midst of thanksgiving are thankful but not truly happy with what we have, and desire, secretly or openly, the illusion of happiness and fulfillment based on acquiring something.

I read an article once that stated a large percentage of Canadian's retirement plans were based on winning the lottery. I think one of the greatest measures of our illusions of fulfillment is how much time, mental energy and even hope we receive by fantasizing about winning the lottery/cash in a contest or inheriting money. We sit back and reflect on all we would do, the debts we would pay off, the trips we would take, the people we would help, and even what we would say to the boss. In essence, the hope and feeling we receive from that becomes like a drug of false fulfillment.

I think Scripture teaches that we can be fooled and tricked into the illusion of fulfillment. I think God desires us to break that illusion and learn from Jesus that fulfillment is not found in material possessions and in illusions of fulfillment, but in being satisfied and truly and profoundly thankful for what we have today without the unsaid condition that we want more.

A great example is Paul and Silas in prison in Acts 16. Imagine being severely beaten and jailed (a first century Roman jail) because you helped a girl who was demon possessed. Then imagine what your days and nights in that jail would have been like. Now look at what Paul and Silas did, they didn't complain but sang joyfully and prayed. They were in the worst of conditions, and they were praising God. Unlike Paul and Silas, I think many of us would have been asking God why, or dreaming about our release and what our first meal would be.

That will most likely never be our situation, but maybe your situation is a financial prison, a physical prison due to sickness or even an emotional prison. For each of us I think the truth to grasp is that no matter where we are, we have something to be thankful for, and that something is our relationship with a loving God that no one or situation can ever take away. As followers of Jesus, our true hope is not to be found in our fantasized future or an illusion of fulfillment but in our present hope and relationship with God that is now and forever.

So as we enter the season of thanksgiving, think about what it means to be truly thankful and even content for what you have and where you are, without coveting what could be.

*Like always, this article is meant to promote thought and discussion and if you disagree, it resonated with you, or you were challenged, please feel free to let me know. I am always open to talking - feel free to call, drop in, go for coffee or email me (bryce@devonalliancechurch.ca).*

- Pastor Bryce Ashlin-Mayo